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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT WEDNESDAY, December 20, 1939

(For Broadcast Use Only)

SUBJECT: "CHRISTMAS TREES AND GREENS." Information from the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Maybe you're one of the many people with Christmas tree qualms at this time of year. You see all the young trees coming to market. You hear that 10 million trees are cut every year for Christmas trade. And you wonder whether all this cutting at Christmas time isn't a destructive waste of the Nation's forests and woodlands. Perhaps you even go as far as to wonder if good citizens better not give up the Christmas tree custom to save the trees.

If you have Christmas tree worries, you'll be glad to hear that men of the United States Forest Service don't believe in giving up the Christmas tree tradition even if that were possible. They say that of all the uses for trees, this one use probably brings the most happiness, especially to children. And they say that cutting trees for Christmas need not harm the forests. It can be most helpful. So Santa Claus and the conservationists can work hand in hand--and often do nowadays. Moreover, the foresters say that cutting Christmas trees can be a good and permanent source of income for farm families. You, and your children, and your grandchildren, and great-grandchildren can all make Christmas money from the same woodland, if you always cut the trees wisely.

The Christmas trees going to market from the National forests all have been cut to aid the forests. They are the seedlings thinned out of dense stands to make room for other trees to have good growth. If you are interested in buying one of these trees, look for one tagged with a red label which says: "This tree was cut from "--and here the tag gives the name of some National forest--" under the direction of

the U. S. Forest Service for the improvement of the forest stand." On the back of the tag are the words: "The prevention of forest fires through the past years has made possible this tree to decorate your home on Christmas Day."

A number of States also give certificates for Christmas trees cut according to good forestry principles. Many of these certified trees come from Christmas tree plantations. The owners of these plantations make a business of growing and cutting trees for the Christmas trade. They plant trees at the rate of about 5 thousand an acre and cut them in from 4 to 8 years. The Forest Service says Christmas tree plantations can be profitable if they are near large cities with established markets and in localities where few evergreens grow wild.

In New England farmers often sell at Christmas time the young evergreens which have sprung up on pasture land and would have to be cut anyway. The Christmas market gives the farmer a chance to get a little money, even if it is only 10 cents a tree, in return for the labor of cutting the trees.

This is the bright side of the Christmas tree picture. If all Christmas trees were trees grown for cutting, or trees that had to be cut anyway to clear pastures or thin timber stands, nobody would have any cause for worry.

Unfortunately, the Christmas tree picture has a dark side as well as a bright side. Near many large cities wholesale and destructive cutting of Christmas trees is still going on. Many fine large trees lose their handsome tops each year and then are good for very little. The tops are sold for the Christmas trade. And Christmas thieves still go out slashing and destroying other people's property, doing special damage to young trees near highways. This is the sort of tree destruction well worth worry. This is one reason for the movement for tags on trees. Some day let's hope no one will buy a tree without being sure how it was cut.

And let's hope this is also the case with Christmas greens some day. A vast lot of decorative foliage and boughs goes to the Christmas market. Evergreen sprigs

from nearly all parts of the country; magnolia and mistletoe from the South; holly and laurel from the East; Christmasberry and Oregon hollygrape, and salal from the Pacific Coast--all these help make up the flood of greenery selling in the markets now. Even common woods ferns and huckleberry sprigs and galax take their place among the Christmas greens. And many farm families make their Christmas cash from cutting and selling greens and making Christmas wreaths. But even the familiar native plants like mountain laurel and ground pine deserve careful cutting. In some parts of the Northeast these evergreens are getting scarce, and good citizens think twice before gathering them or buying them. If greens as well as trees could sell with tags, this might help save some of our most attractive native plants.

That reminds me of holly. Holly is an outstanding example of what thoughtless Christmas cutting can do. Not so many years ago our native holly with its bright red berries grew wild all up and down the Atlantic Coast States. Now in many places it has entirely disappeared. In some States conservation commissions are now trying to save what holly is left by supervising the Christmas cutting. About 10 thousand people engage in the yearly holly harvest on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and they make about 150 thousand dollars. In Delaware the Forest Conservation Commission reported one year's holly crop brought in 400 thousand dollars, a hundred thousand of that for labor alone. Maryland and Delaware are two States that now realize how saving the holly by wise cutting pays dividends to its citizens.

That's all the Christmas tree news for today. If you want more information, you are always welcome to write the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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